



managing expectations

## 2.9 Managing expectations and boundaries

It's important to protect yourself from disappointment by having realistic expectations of the person you support. Begin by recognising what your expectations are or were of the person you support.

Sometimes the person you support will be well and remind you of who they were before they became unwell. Wanting the same level of relationship or life goals for the person are also forms of expectations that are difficult to detach from. For example, the person you support might've been calm, friendly, outgoing and enjoyed chatting with you on the phone every couple of days. Now, they might be withdrawn, cagey and rarely answer your phone calls.

The change in relationship and expectations you had for the person or persons you support can bring up strong feelings of loss and grief. This is normal. It can help to manage these emotions by naming up those expectations.

Once you've identified them for yourself and the person you support, think about who owns that expectation. Is it what you, or what family, friends or society expect? Is the expectation serving you or holding you back? What would you lose or gain by letting go of this expectation?



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YOU MIGHT LIKE TO FILL OUT THIS TABLE TO HELP YOU REFLECT ON YOUR EXPECTATIONS:

WHAT IS THE EXPECTATION?	WHOSE EXPECTATION IS IT?	IS THIS EXPECTATION HELPFUL OR HOLDING YOU BACK?	WHAT WOULD YOU LOSE OR GAIN BY LETTING GO OF THIS EXPECTATION?
Example: I'll never be able to go on holidays again	Mine	It's holding me back. In actual fact, having a holiday is a very reasonable expectation	I could set a goal, make a plan for care while I'm away and I'd be able to go on holidays at a time when my daughter is doing ok

Boundaries are essential to sustain a healthy relationship with the person you support.

Poor boundary setting can lead to long term co-dependency, manipulation, anger and resentment, and ultimately fatigue or even burnout.

It can be difficult to set boundaries for a person you support. Many people find they need help to maintain and reinforce them.

Ask yourself the following questions and discuss them with a person you trust or a counsellor:

- How can I set boundaries when things are constantly changing?
- How do I respond when my boundaries are being tested?
- How much "give" can I tolerate when my boundaries are nudged, or tested?
- How can I make sure that I'm meeting my own needs whilst being conscious of the capacity of the person I'm supporting?
- At what point am I prepared to compromise? How much compromise am I prepared to make?
- When is it time to reassert boundaries I've let go of?

The answers to these questions will depend much on your understanding of yourself and the person you support. However, situations which call for firmer boundaries include:

- **Physical:** hitting, touching, hygiene, space.
- **Psychological:** verbal abuse, threats.
- **Legal, ethical, moral:** stealing, lying.

You can find more information about boundaries on these sites:

- **Sane Australia:** How to set boundaries with someone you love. - [sane.org/information-stories/the-sane-blog/wellbeing/boundaries-for-carers](https://www.sane.org/information-stories/the-sane-blog/wellbeing/boundaries-for-carers).
- **Carers Australia, NSW:** Search: Caring for someone who is dependent on alcohol or another drug – What are emotional boundaries?
- **Carer Gateway:** Carer Skills Module 3: Recharge and reconnect. There's a section on 'saying no' under the 'active listening' section. - [skills.carergateway.gov.au/pdfs/CarerSkills-Module\\_3-Recharge\\_and\\_reconnect-a.pdf](https://skills.carergateway.gov.au/pdfs/CarerSkills-Module_3-Recharge_and_reconnect-a.pdf).
- You may also be interested in a five-minute video. **Carers Australia, Victoria:** Tips for Saying No - [youtube.com/watch?v=MAv31frvg-U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAv31frvg-U).

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*"I would like him to live with me as this would help his financial situation but his unstable mental health has meant that I have to ask him regularly to leave my home and return to his until he is more stable."*

- Elizabeth, 68.

